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ABSTRACT

The United States Education Department recognizes projects that effectively meet the special needs of educationally deprived students. In 1992, the Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Chapter 1 preschool program earned national validation as an "unusually successful" compensatory education program. The program has served as a statewide model, and has helped hundreds of at-risk children enter school on an equal educational basis with other children for over 20 years. The program has two components. The Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) for 2- and 3-year-old children is a home-based program that fosters verbal interaction between preschoolers and their parents, thereby supporting children's cognitive growth. Paraprofessionals teach parents to effectively use developmentally appropriate materials and activities with their toddlers. The school-based Four-Year-Old's Program serves as a transition between the PCHP and kindergarten, and consolidates and extends the educational gains the child has made in the PCHP. Activities reinforce or introduce basic readiness skills, and foster social growth and physical development. Other vital elements of Pittsfield's program are: (1) coordination with the regular school program; (2) the provision of feedback through the monitoring of student progress; (3) strong leadership; (4) professional development and training; (5) parent and community involvement; (6) positive school and classroom climates; (7) recognition given to children for positive behavior or performance; and (8) the use of evaluation results for program improvement. (TJQ)

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# 'Unusually Successful'

## PITTSFIELD CHAPTER 1

*An exemplary Chapter 1 program selected under the Secretary of Education's Initiative to Identify 'Unusually Successful' Compensatory Education Programs*

1992

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In the spring of 1992, Pittsfield's Chapter 1 program earned national validation as an "unusually successful" compensatory education program. For the past 10 years, the United States Education Department has identified Chapter 1 programs nationwide that effectively meet the special needs of educationally deprived students. Projects selected under the Secretary's Initiative are expected to demonstrate:

- Clear program goals and objectives that establish high expectations
- Appropriate instructional materials and methods that make maximum use of learning time
- Coordination with the regular school program
- Student progress closely monitored to provide regular feedback and reinforcement
- Strong leadership
- Professional development and training
- Parent-community involvement
- Positivite school-classroom climate
- Excellence recognized and rewarded
- Evaluation results used for program improvement

Additionally, achievement had to be indicated by:

- Formal measures of achievement (e.g., test score gains)
- Informal measures of achievement (e.g., student self-assessment or teacher-parent judgment)
- Other project outcomes (e.g., reduced dropout rates, improved student discipline)
- Sustained gains

*Unusually Successful* includes the text of Pittsfield's application, describing how the validated project meets the Secretary's criteria.

### PITTSFIELD PROGRAM PROFILE

| | |
|---|---|
| Type of school district | Small urban |
| Enrollment | 6,832 |
| Total number of instructional staff | 447.8 |
| Grades | Pre-K - 12 |
| Racial/ethnic composition of student body: | |
| American Indian or native Alaskan | 0.0% |
| Asian or Pacific Islander | 0.5% |
| Black, not of Hispanic origin | 13.0% |
| White, not of Hispanic origin | 86.0% |
| Hispanic | 0.5% |
| Percentage of students from low-income families (Criteria: Aid for Families with Dependent Children) | 12.4% |
| Major demographic changes last 3-5 years: | |
| – Declining local economy/plant closings | |
| – 5.9% decline in general population | |
| – 9.7% decline in school enrollment | |
| – 3.2% increase in AFDC children | |
| Funding | Basic grant |
| Components receiving validation: | Preschool |
| Number of children participating (public schools) (174 Preschool) | 811 |
| Number of staff in project: | |
| Administrators | 2 |
| Teachers | 4 |
| Aides | 18 |
| Volunteers | 35 |
| School year(s) project is nominated | 1970-91 |
| Estimated annual per pupil cost ('90-91) | $1,762 |

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## Program Overview

The City of Pittsfield is a small city in the westernmost county of Massachusetts. Pittsfield's population has experienced a 5.9% decline over the past five years to a current low of 47,530. The surrounding Berkshire Hills are home to cultural attractions: Tanglewood, summer theaters, Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival, museums, four colleges, and many historical homes. Berkshire County is a four-season resort for tourists: summer sports and cultural activities, brilliant fall foliage, winter skiing, and the beauty of a country spring.

The Pittsfield Public Schools are governed by a seven-member school committee that includes the mayor. Current student population is 6,832, including eight elementary schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and one alternate school. The Pittsfield Public Schools' Chapter 1 Program provides services to two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There are several major components of the Chapter 1 program: The Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP), the Four-Year-Old's Program, parent involvement, remedial reading and language arts, grades K-12, and remedial math, grades K-12.

The preschool program is being presented here as a model that has stood the test of time with documented success. It has served as a state-wide model for replication, but more importantly, it has helped hundreds of "at-risk" children over the past 20 years enter school on an equal educational basis. The preschool program has two distinct components designed to introduce early intervention for "at-risk" toddlers and continue the service for three years, until the child enters kindergarten. The PCHP and Four-Year-Old's Program follow instructional models that have been developed and refined over 20 years.

The PCHP is a home-based program to prevent educational disadvantage by fostering verbal interaction and cognitive growth between preschoolers and their parents. The child and parent enroll in the PCHP when the child is two years of age and both continue in the program for two years. Selected games and books are used by paraprofessionals to guide parents to be effective teachers of their toddlers. The program has a proven track record and is very cost-effective. In addition to the 80 Chapter 1 PCHP participants, 40 non-Chapter 1 parent/child pairs are serviced through local funding.

The Four-Year-Old's Program serves as a transition between the home-based PCHP and kindergarten. The program consolidates and extends the educational gains the child has made in the PCHP. The program includes socialization through organized group activities, introduction to numbers, letters, colors, shapes, textures, etc., physical activities, cultural enrichment, and, most importantly, continuation of the school-home relationship.

Significant goals of Pittsfield's preschool program are basic skills achievement, avoidance of remedial classes during later school years, building a positive self-image for both parent and child, fostering good home-school relationships, reducing family tensions, making the community aware that education begins at home, and inspiring parents to continue with their own education.

**1**

### Clear project goals that state high expectations for student learning and behavior

The main objective of Pittsfield's Chapter 1 preschool program is preventive. Through the screening process of all entering kindergarten students, it is very evident that a far greater proportion of children from Chapter 1 target areas who receive no preschool services come to school with cognitive and experiential deficiencies. These deficiencies are in many cases the basis for academic difficulties in the early years of school. Such difficulties are too often compounded as time goes on, even when supplementary assistance is provided in school by Chapter 1 or other remedial programs.

The capability of schools to remedy pupils' initial deficiencies in language development, spatial and quantitative reasoning skills, and breadth and depth of experience is necessarily limited. However well-organized a school-based supplementary remedial program, and however competent and dedicated its staff, the task of surmounting the readiness deficits that Chapter 1 children bring with them to school is enormous. Long-term success, defined as bringing participants permanently up to grade level, is rare in Chapter 1.

Pittsfield's preschool initiative, the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP) for two- and three-year olds, and the school-based Four-Year-Old's Program is therefore an early intervention structured to provide sufficient help to participants to enable them to perform at or near grade level in the basic skills areas during their school years.

The PCHP and Four-Year-Old's Program follow instructional models that have been developed and refined over many years. Consistency in the procedures followed each year is ensured by the use of highly trained, skilled, and experienced staff, as well as by the periodic employment of external evaluators to provide formative, summative, and longitudinal assessments of these programs' success.

The PCHP and the Four-Year-Old's Program have been operating for almost 20 years. The programs are well known in Pittsfield and throughout Massachusetts. Nevertheless, annual recruitment requires publicity through newspaper, radio, and television notices, door-to-door solicitation, flyers sent home through school children and, probably most significantly, word of mouth. Through these means the preventive purposes of the programs are emphasized to parents.

**2**

## Appropriate instructional materials and methods that make maximum use of academic learning time

The preschool component of Pittsfield's Chapter 1 program consists of two separate but related parts. The first is the PCHP, a two-year program for toddlers (two- and three-year olds) and their parents. The second is a third-year continuation of the preventive effort in a classroom environment. The Four-Year-Old's Program, which establishes a bridge between the home and school, operates half a day, four days a week.

The PCHP replicates the Verbal Interaction Project model of the home-based instruction for parent-child "dyads" that was inaugurated in the 1960's in Freeport, N.Y., by Dr. Phyllis Levenstein. In the course of some 92 sessions spread over two years, paraprofessional "Teaching Demonstrators" (TDs) visit the parent and child at home. The purpose of each visit is to model for the parent how to use a specific game or book to stimulate conversation, curiosity, and learning in the child. The 24 books and 22 games used in the program for each child are provided by Chapter 1 at no cost to the parent and left at the home for future use and continued stimulation. Book titles include: *Snowy Day, Mother Goose, Pat The Bunny, Corduroy,* and *Make Way For Ducklings*. Games include: puzzles, creative blocks, wooden blocks, Tyco blocks, and memory games.

***"Parent involvement in Pittsfield's Chapter 1 program is both a philosophical premise and the hallmark of its success."***

As the sessions proceed, the parent is expected to observe and imitate the TD, eventually acquiring the skills the PCHP stresses. The books and games, known technically as VISMs (Verbal Interaction Stimulation Mechanisms), are chosen specially for each step in the developmental sequence. The VISMs, which can be varied to some extent according to program budgets and product availability, must be capable of engaging the child in specific learning activities. The main objective of VISMs is to provide the child with both pleasure and learning while utilizing the parent as the primary teacher.

After two years of home-based assistance, with TDs changing child/parent pairs each semester in order to ensure their objective and non-intrusive involvement, PCHP 's parents are encouraged to enroll their children in the third year of service in a preschool classroom. Known as the Four-Year-Old's Program, each of three classes enrolls up to 18 children staffed by a teacher and two assistant teachers. Due to attrition of PCHP children, slots are available to children who have had no prior Chapter 1 preschool experience.

The Four-Year-Old's Program has many aspects, all of which are meant to consolidate and extend the cognitive gains the child has made in the first two years of preschool. One facet is socialization, which includes the child's acclimation to organized group activities. Another facet is the explicit reinforcement and development of what has been covered in the first two years. In the third year, however, there is a more systematic introduction to

numbers and letters, colors, shapes, textures, and so on. The third year also introduces physical activities aimed at fostering the proper development of each child's small and large motor skill competencies. The Four-Year-Old's Program promotes cultural enrichment through games, songs, and projects. A final and no less crucial aspect of the third preschool year is the frequent meetings held at home or school by program teachers with parents. These meetings are intended to inform parents of their child's progress in the program as well as to help the parents generate useful ways to promote their child's intellectual, social, and physical development at home.

Materials used in the classroom include a variety of sturdy toys, blocks, storybooks, kitchen paraphernalia, paints and clay, paper and crayons. The Chapter 1 teachers follow a detailed curriculum that identifies the instructional use and pertinence of specific types of items at every step in the academic program. This program's curriculum is locally developed. It relies heavily, however, on generally accepted curricular ideals for preschool classrooms.

The grouping of children in the Four-Year-Old's classrooms is flexible and temporary. Inasmuch as individualized pupil planning is a primary focus of its instructional program, the program's professional staff ensures that each child's activities are varied each day. A given child will routinely take part in both large and small group activities, as well as individual work or play, in the course of a classroom day. Each activity is planned to reinforce or introduce a basic readiness skill, or to foster the social growth or physical development of each child.

***"Parents are the key instructors in the home-based PCHP. Consequently, each parent is systematically shown by trained paraprofessional home visitors how to talk and play constructively with their child."***

## 3

### Coordination with the regular school program

Since the main objective of Pittsfield's Chapter 1 Preschool Program is prevention, its main function is preparation for success in school. Therefore, there is an ongoing process of student follow-up and feedback between the preschool program and the elementary school curriculum.

The PCHP's formal ties to the regular program of instruction (although certainly not to the school system) are incidental rather than systematic. It is a somewhat different matter, however, with the Four-Year-Old's program. This program's classes operate in public schools. The participants almost always go on to enter public school kindergartens. This closeness to regular school operations, staff, and expectations leads the Chapter 1 Four-Year-Old's program's teachers to meet as a rule throughout the year with kindergarten teachers. The purpose of these meetings is to review the academic progress of previous program participants and to reinforce the congruent goals of the two programs.

## 4

### Student progress monitored to provide regular feedback and reinforcement

The progress of preschoolers cannot be monitored in the same way as the progress of school-age children. Written tests are not useful for those who cannot yet write; recitations are a bit more feasible, but are not likely to be very informative. What is more, the PCHP does not even operate in a classroom. This does not mean, however, that the progress of program participants is not monitored, measured, recorded, and weighed. It means merely that indicators other than paper-and-pencil tests must be used in establishing and assessing each participant's progress.

In order to ensure that the long-term goals of the PCHP are on course with each parent/child pair, several steps are taken throughout the year and from year to year.

Formal evaluation testing is done three times in the two-year program. The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) is administered to each child who participates when he or she enters, when the child completes his or her first year in the program, and in the spring of the child's second and final year. Moreover, and more substantively, each session of every case is written up weekly by each TD on a reporting form that is the basis for weekly case reviews by the PCHP supervisors. The session is described on the form in categories of quality of parent participation, distractions, unusual happenings, and so on, and a brief narrative is appended. In addition, at least once a semester each TD tapes a home session. This recording is then reviewed with the TD by her supervisor.

Participant progress evaluation in the Four-Year-Old's Program is somewhat more traditional. Formal evaluation testing is done spring to spring with the PPVT. Formal diagnostic testing is done in the fall and spring with Caldwell's Cooperative Preschool Inventory. The teachers in the Four-Year-Old's Program also keep detailed records, updated daily, on each participant's language growth, concept development, social and emotional progress, perceptual motor achievements, self-awareness, and habits of personal hygiene. These last, more informal, teacher records constitute the basis for much of what is shared with a participant's parents by Chapter I preschool staff.

## 5

### Strong leadership

The school committee and the superintendent of schools and his cabinet are all strong supporters of Pittsfield's Chapter I preschool program. Under their general control, the Chapter I director provides coordination and leadership. Day-to-day management of each component is handled capably by the programs' respective leaders. Leadership of the PCHP is a significant responsibility and the position has been designated as an administrative position by the School Committee. The position is jointly funded by Chapter I and the local budget in that the current incumbent also serves as the Early Childhood Coordinator for the school system. In light of the fact that the PCHP is home-based rather than school-based, the PCHP coordinator assumes a strong program leadership role for the training and supervision of 14 teaching demonstrators, the coordination of home visits to 120 children, and dealing with the social and interpersonal issues of the population being served. Leadership for the Four-Year-Old's Program is provided by its founder, who serves as coordinating teacher for the program.

***"The capability of schools to remedy pupils' initial deficiencies in language development, spatial and quantitative reasoning skills, and breadth and depth of experience is necessarily limited."***

The Chapter I director holds several formal meetings throughout the year for all preschool professional staff. Commonality of effort is thereby reinforced, and specific concerns of preschool staff are dealt with. In addition, staff from the two programs meet on their own throughout the year to share information about children who will move from year Two to year Three of the preschool effort.

The director also serves as a liaison between preschool staff and building principals. It is also his responsibility to ensure that program activities and accomplishments are publicized. Such publicity includes disseminating reports, meeting with locally funded staff, newspaper coverage, and promoting the programs' success through recognition opportunities such of the one represented by this nomination.

## 6

### Professional development and training

Each year a significant portion of Pittsfield's Chapter I budget is allocated for professional development activities. Chapter I staff are actively encouraged to attend conferences and seminars, visit other programs, and participate in all system-wide professional development days. The preschool staff are usually among the most active in furthering their respective competencies through professional development activities. In additon, both preschool components conduct extensive training each year within their respective programs.

Each school year begins for the TDs with five full days of pre-service training given by the supervisors. This training stresses early childhood development and the sociological and psychological dimensions of the family situations the TDs will en-

counter. Much time is spent describing and discussing the latest and best-established research on toddler behavior and psychology. The TDs role-play to prepare themselves for the variety of parent-child encounters in which they will participate. Finally, the TDs commence simultaneously what is to become for them a weekly, three-hour training session. The weekly session comprises reviews of the home visits of the previous week, sometimes by using tape recordings; discussion of common problems encountered during home visits; it also trains the TD in the most effective use of the book or toy the TD will bring to each home that week for parent-child training. In the course of a year each TD will receive up to 100 hours of this specialized training.

The assistant teachers who assist in the Four-Year-Old's classrooms work closely with the teachers for up to three weeks before the children arrive in September. These paraprofessionals prepare much of the "consumable" instructional material used throughout the year, prepare the classroom itself, and in the course of doing so review with the teachers the use of the materials and facilities. The Four-Year-Old's staff meet as a classroom group on a daily basis to discuss individual student progress and instructional issues. Each Friday is, in effect, a professional development day in that the staff has the time to meet either as classroom groups or a full staff.

In addition to the many program- and system-supported activities, many individuals have pursued coursework and advanced degrees on their own as professional educators.

## 7 Parent/community involvement

Parent involvement in Pittsfield's Chapter 1 program is both a philosophical premise and the hallmark of its success. Directed by a trained and experienced practitioner in parental participation, Pittsfield's Chapter 1 Program is a model that has been visited and replicated by other school systems from across the state. In addition to guiding the global responsibilities activities of the Chapter 1 Parent Advisory Council, the parent coordinator also serves as a facilitator for individual school or class parent activities. Examples of parental activities are Family Fun Nights, fund raisers, book fairs, breakfast/lunch gatherings, Family Centers in the schools, adult training, parenting skills classes, assistance with RIF (Reading is Fundamental) distributions, and Community Reading Day. In addition, two community outreach assistant teachers are based at two Chapter 1 community elementary schools to serve as a conduit between teachers and parents. In this role supplementary instructional materials are developed to reinforce classroom work at home.

Each preschool component also has individual and unique parent involvement activity. Parents are the key instructors in the home-based PCHP. Consequently, each parent is systematically shown by trained paraprofessional home visitors how to talk and play constructively with their child. Parents are therefore the direct if not ultimate target population for this program. It is through their parents that needy two- and three-year old children are reached and helped.

***"The 24 books and 22 games used in the program for each child are provided by Chapter 1 at no cost to the parent and left at the home for future use and continued stimulation."***

Parents are also important in the Four-Year-Old's Program. The instructional model for this program is classroom-based, run by professional staff assisted by aides. Parent volunteers are actively involved in classroom work and employed as bus monitors, and an active Four-Year-Old's parent council is established each year. The purpose of this council is to organize projects for the children that the parents themselves may want to undertake and in some cases underwrite through fund raising activities. Parent involvement for the Four-Year-Old's Program approaches 100%. Parents from both preschool programs are encouraged to take part in the LEA's Chapter 1 Parent Advisory Council (PAC).

8

### Positive school/classroom climate

Although PCHP is home-based and the Four-Year-Old's Program classroom-based, both instructional climates are worth noting because the environment is crucial to the success or failure of the instructional program.

In the PCHP the paraprofessional TD must ensure that the time with the parent and child is focused on the game or book, and specifically on the effective verbal exchange between parent and child. The TD is in the home to model for and show the parent how best to use the VISM to capture and then hold the child's attention. The challenge of the TD's home visit is to establish a climate for a positive instructive verbal exchange between the parent and child at a time when children's behavior is often very disorderly and difficult.

The classroom climate of the Four-Year-Old's Program is determined by the structure of the curriculum, which organizes purposeful activities for children for the whole school day. This is not to say that regimentation is imposed or that the classroom day is ruled dictatorially by the clock. The atmosphere of the Chapter 1 preschool classrooms is one in which all activities are clearly defined and all behaviors have clear boundaries.

The three Four-Year-Old's classrooms are located in two relatively new community schools that are warm and well-equipped.

9

### Excellence recognized and rewarded

Unlike students who have begun school, preschoolers do not receive grades for their work. Nevertheless, children in Pittsfield's Chapter 1 preschool component receive considerable positive reinforcement for their accomplishments. In addition, participants' parents are well-informed about their child's progress.

Children in the PCHP receive at least twice weekly praise and encouragement for their efforts, this being the number of times per week the TD visits each home. Parents are shown how to expand on their established position as their child's original and primary teacher by using techniques demonstrated by the TD. The child's progress, therefore, is not invisible to his or her parents and there are ample opportunities for recognizing and rewarding positive child behavior and performance.

Children taking part in the Four-Year-Old's program receive daily reinforcement, encouragement, and praise from the program's staff. The emphasis in this component, where children may be working together for the first time, is on cooperation and accomplishment. Hence, no child is singled out for exceptional praise; reinforcement and encouragement is provided informally.

The rewards for staff are twofold. First, seeing the impact of their efforts documented by valid research is in itself a significant reward. Secondly, being acknowledged by the local administration, the school committee, and the federal Department of Education is truly a recognition of excellence.

***"Parent involvement for the Four-Year-Old's Program approaches 100%."***

10

### Evaluation results used for program or project improvement

Given that the goal of Pittsfield's preschool program is prevention, the sought-after academic effects on its participants are long-term. Raising participants' achievement scores over the course of the school year is not a sufficient measure of program effectiveness. Only by examining former participants' performances as they proceed through school can the real long-term impact of the preschool effort be determined. The results of two independent long-range studies of Pittsfield's preschool programs are presented and discussed in Section III of this nomination.

The instructional format of the PCHP is fixed by the model that it follows. This model, the "Freeport" or "Levenstein" model, was examined in 1979. Pittsfield's component was included in the analysis. There is a very close, ongoing relationship

between the Pittsfield PCHP Program and the Verbal Interaction Project. This relationship allows Pittsfield to reap the benefits of the study in terms of program improvement recommendations.

Two formal longitudinal evaluations of Pittsfield's PCHP by independent evaluators in 1984 and 1990 have provided solid data which warrant this nomination. In 20 years of extensive scrutiny, only minor modifications have been recommended for the PCHP. This is a tribute to its founders and the people who have implemented it.

Currently, a national network of Mother-Child Home Program replicators serves as a clearinghouse for sharing data and innovative ideas. They also meet annually for a two-day conference with Dr. Levenstein to share and learn.

Since it is not based on an unusual home-centered model such as the Verbal Interaction Project, the Four-Year-Old's program is more amenable to formal evaluation.

Regular evaluations of the Pittsfield Chapter I Program have scrutinized the instructional activities and impact of the Four-Year-Old's Program. Such evaluations have taken place during FY85 and FY91. As is the case with the PCHP , the long track record of the Four-Year-Old's Program testifies to its success. At this point in time, only minor modifications have been recommended by the evaluators. In the past, recommendations have been made to modify testing instruments, recordkeeping and facilities, but have always commended instructional practices and organization.

## Project Effectiveness and Achievement

The enduring effectiveness of the PCHP is documented by objective evidence from two separate research sources. Twenty years of systematically investigating the effects of the Mother-Child Home Program by its creator, Dr. Phyllis Levenstein, and the PCHP by the Pittsfield Public Schools have produced both short-term and long-range data that are impressive. These results indicated that on average, the program significantly aided low-income children's intellectual growth and later school performance.

***Pittsfield's Chapter 1 preschool staff (L-R): Erma Broverman, Sue Collins, Barbara Dalo, Jim Shiminski, Linda Deibl, Judy Stolzberg, and Jane Johnson.***

In 1985 Pittsfield's became the first replication of the Mother-Child Home Program to examine the effects of the PCHP on academic performance through grade eight. The study reached the following conclusions: "Students who had been in the PCHP significantly out-performed the comparison group of Chapter I students on each of four measures (reading, language, mathematics, and total scores). Overall, program intervention for two- and three-year olds had lasting effects, since as a group throughout school they met or exceeded national achievement norms and generally outperformed the groups to which they were compared."

Five years later (1990), a second longitudinal evaluation was conducted to further examine the long term effects of the PCHP. The second longitudinal study tracked program completers through high school and into post-secondary education. It clearly indicated that the program has been highly successful in aiding disadvantaged youth as they progressed through school. The achievement scores of program completers were at or above national norms, relatively few students were retained in grade, fewer than expected required further Chapter I services, and as many graduated from high school as might be expected in an urban school system. Of special note is that a high proportion of these graduates went on to higher education institutions after leaving the Pittsfield schools.

Evaluation of the Four-Year-Old's program has been of a lesser magnitude than the PCHP in that it does not have the close linkage with a national model. It is, however, monitored on an annual basis and formally evaluated by a third party every three years. A formal third party evaluation took place during the 1990-1991 school year.

[For a more complete description of the evaluation results of Pittsfield's nationally validated Chapter 1 project, contact the Chapter 1 office in Pittsfield (413-499-9520) or the Chapter 1 Dissemination Project (617-426-6324).